

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-15

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P R 132224Z SEP 78
FM AMEMBASSY QUITO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9397
INFO AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
AMEMBASSY LA PAZ
AMEMBASSY LIMA
AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO
AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL
USCINCSO QUARRY HTS CZ

C O N F I D E N T I A L QUITO 6422

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, EC
SUBJECT: SET SITUATION WORSENS WITH BAQUERO RESIGNATION AND
ARREST OF CRITIC

1. SUPREME ELECTORAL TRIBUNAL (SET) PRESIDENT JOSE BAQUERE DE LA CALLE SUBMITTED HIS RESIGNATION, PURPORTEDLY ON THE GROUNDS OF ILL HEALTH, TO THE GOE ON SEPT. 12 AND IT WAS IMMEDIATELY ACCEPTED. SET VICE PRESIDENT RAFAEL ARIZAGA VEGA WILL ACT IN HIS PLACE UNTIL SET MEMBERS ELECT A NEW PRESIDENT. POLITICAL OBSERVERS BELIEVE BAQUERO'S RESIGNATION STEMS DIRECTLY FROM A DISAGREEMENT WITH ARIZAGA WHICH WAS AIRED IN HEAD-TO-TAIL PRESS CONFERENCES SEPT. 11. ARIZAGA ANNOUNCED AT HIS CONFERENCE THAT HE WILL APPEAR ON NATIONAL T.V. AND RADIO THIS COMING WEEKEND TO PRESENT PROOF OF HIS OFT-REPEATED ACCUSATIONS OF FRAUD IN THE JULY 16 ELECTIONS. HE ADDED THAT HE WOULD BE SPEAKING FOR THE ENTIRE SET IN THIS MATTER. WHEN QUERIED BY THE PRESS BAQUERO REFUSED TO CONFIRM THAT ARIZAGA WOULD BE SPEAKING FOR THE SET, LEAVING THE IMPRESSION THAT HIS COMMENTS WERE NOT AUTHORIZED. APPARENTLY BAQUERO
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DID NOT RECEIVE SUPPORT FROM THE SET OR THE GOE ON THIS ISSUE AND CHOSE TO RESIGN. POLITICAL FIGURES FROM BOTH THE JAIME ROLDOS AND SIXTO DURAN-BALLEN CAMPS (INCLUDING SIXTO HIMSELF) HAVE EXPRESSED STRONG CONCERN THAT BAQUERO'S RESIGNATION BODES ILL FOR THE RETORNO PROCESS.

2. IN A GENERALLY UNRELATED INCIDENT, BUT ONE WHICH IS

CAUSE FOR SOME CONCERN ABOUT ECUADOR'S POLITICAL FUTURE, EDGAR MOLINA MONTALVO, ABDON CALDERON'S RUNNING MATE ON THE RADICAL ALFARIST FRONT TICKET IN THE FIRST ROUND ELECTION, WAS ARRESTED SEPT. 12 AND JAILED. MOLINA WAS REPORTEDLY DETAINED FOR STATEMENTS HE MADE IN A TELEVISION INTERVIEW THE NIGHT BEFORE WHICH WERE HARSHLY CRITICAL OF THE SET AND ITS PERFORMANCE. MOLINA IS THE SECOND POLITICIAN TO BE ARRESTED SINCE JULY 16 FOR CRITICIZING THE SET. THE OTHER, A GUAYAQUIL CFP OFFICIAL, DR. GIBLERTO PLAZA, WAS SENTENCED ON AUGUST 30 TO FIFTEEN DAYS JAIL AND A FINE ON INSTRUCTIONS FROM BAQUERO, BUT WAS RELEASED TWO DAYS LATER AFTER A PUBLIC FUROR ERUPTED.

3. COMMENT: ARIZAGA HAS CONSISTENTLY TAKEN THE HARDEST LINE IN THE SET ON THE QUESTION OF ALLEGED FRAUD, AS PART OF THE EFFORT TO DISCREDIT THE ENTIRE ELECTORAL PROCESS. HIS VICTORY OVER BAQUERO ON THE SPONSORSHIP OF HIS UPCOMING DISCLOSURES OF SUCH FRAUD PLACES THE FUTURE OF RETORNO IN SERIOUS DOUBT.

4. MOLINA'S ARREST DEMONSTRATES ONCE AGAIN THE ARBITRARY NATURE OF JUSTICE UNDER THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT AND THE FACT THAT POLITICIANS STRONGLY CRITICIZE GOE INSTITUTIONS AT THEIR OWN RISK. IT MAY ALSO, HOWEVER, SIGNAL THE BEGINNING OF A CAMPAIGN TO LIMIT PUBLIC DISCUSSION OF THE SET'S ACTIVITIES, A DEVELOPMENT THAT WOULD BE CAUSE
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FOR REAL CONCERN.
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